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Patrick Vandermeersch
Sodomites, Gays and Biblical Scholars
A gathering organized by Peter Damian?

People are never interested in the past for its own sake. The interest is always based on a subjective motivation, and the notion that this can be eliminated derives from a superb naiveté. All that has – and must – be done is to clarify the motives and preconceptions that determine how we deal with the past. The only way for a subject to remain 'objective' is to keep progressing within the hermeneutical circle.

On a less philosophical note, we can restate the above as follows. When one is attracted to the study of a particular topic, there are always motives and preconceptions suggesting this object could be 'interesting' to us. This enticement provides the impulse to investigate the topic more closely and to pay real attention to the facts. However, one should not become captivated by the object. In order to remain 'objective', one must look inward and perform some self-investigation and self-criticism. Is the newly acquired knowledge in line with the first spontaneous reaction of 'how interesting!'? Has the first phase of investigation brought a degree of satisfaction? Has 'knowledge' really been gained or just some comfort provided by a confirmation of previous preconceptions? Unexpected data can be particularly enlightening in this regard, especially when they challenge an existing intellectual framework. Then it is definitely time to make the preconceptions more explicit and examine them critically. Only this will entitle the searching mind to go back to the facts and to perform another hermeneutical turn.

Psychoanalysis shares this view of the circling mind with hermeneutics in general. Ergo, contrary to what is widely believed, psychoanalysis is not an instrument for quicker access to the object. It is not a magical tool for a quicker unveiling of the real, hidden core of an object which could, thereafter, be contemplated in its untouched, naked truth. If psychoanalysis can be useful in hermeneutic circling, it is more as a technique of self-criticism for the subject than as an instrument for closer scrutiny of the object.¹

1. An essential book on psychoanalytic reading is H. Raguse, *Der Raum des Textes, Elemente einer transdisziplinären theologischen Hermeneutik*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1994. I have summarised my key views in R. Kessler & P. Vandermeersch, *God, Biblical Stories and Psychoanalytical*

The usefulness of psychoanalytical insight for the self-reflection of the searching subject is not limited to some special dark sides of our minds, sexuality especially. However, this is what many people believe. In the case of the story of Sodom, they expect psychoanalysts to insist on the importance of daring to conceptualize — and visualize — what exactly could have happened when all these males, without exception, came together in order to 'know' the foreigners. Lots of heads, but also lots of genitals, desires and anal eroticisms, and perhaps other things too... Helping patients to talk about such things is indeed part of a psychoanalyst's work. But there is another topic which is at least as important as sexual fantasies in the human mind, and which is equally important to psychoanalysis: how we relate to the past and how we accept the chain of parents, grandparents, etc. who have brought us into historical being. Where does our personal history fit in the history of the culture to which we belong? This is the central issue where biblical scholarship and psychoanalysis meet intimately.

I realize this statement is somewhat surprising. Many biblical scholars perceive psychoanalysis as a synchronic method for interpreting given texts and facts. This is particularly the case in Germany, where the psychology of religion in general has hardly developed, and where E. Drewermann put his syncretistic Jungian/Freudian stamp on the field of psychoanalytic reading of the Bible.² However, we must not forget that Freudian analysis begins with an active remembering of one's personal past. What happens on the couch is so deeply rooted in that tenet, that Freud was haunted throughout his life by the embarrassing question of whether the 'real' past can ever be recovered.³ A crucial question has remained unanswered and its importance has been reinforced by the debate on false memories in multiple-personality disorders: does analysis cure because it uncovers the repressed memories and wishes by simply bringing them to light without changing their essence? Or does analysis cure because it allows the patient to gain mastery of/over his or her past and makes it possible to reinterpret the memories to make the past coherent? In the latter case – in my opinion, the true case – analytical practice is not so different from exegesis.

To make the matter even more complicated, in the case we are discussing here, i.e. Sodom and sodomy, contemporaneous studies on sex and gender insist

Understanding, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2001.

2. Fortunately, H. Raguse introduced a different approach. See his *Psychoanalyse und biblische Interpretation. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Eugen Drewermanns Auslegung der Johannes-Apokalypse*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1993 and *Der Raum des Textes* (see above).

3. See my book *Unresolved Questions in the Freud/Jung Debate. On Psychosis, Sexual Identity and Religion*. (Translated by Anne-Marie Marivoet and Vincent Sansone) (Louvain Philosophical Studies 4), Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1991.

on the necessity of historical awareness in order to understand and, eventually, to accept the associated sexual identities. It has become generally accepted that homosexuality, for example, is not just a human drive that various people and cultures tend to repress, but a specific cultural construct that exists neither everywhere nor in all times. According to this view, the gay man and woman (i.e. specific human beings with their own psychology), originated in the nineteenth century and their representation functioned as a model for people who styled their identity accordingly. Although we will question this periodization, the basic assumption that human sexuality is not simply a set of fixed instincts but rather a complex, historically and culturally organized framework for desires, seems to be correct. Understanding homosexuality implies understanding it in a historical sense. The problem is that the underlying conception of 'understanding historically' is very different from the same words in biblical scholarship. Here we should add that the major part of the problem is that biblical scholars do not usually like to talk about their (often implicit) philosophy of history.

After discussing this issue in more detail, we will examine the books of two biblical scholars who have dealt explicitly with the nature of Sodom's sin: Derrick Sherwin Bailey's pioneering *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (1955) and Gijs Bouwman's *De zonde van Sodom* [Sodom's Sin] (1990).⁴ We will try to explain the way in which the category of 'history' plays a part in their reasoning. As both writers assign an essential role to Peter Damian in establishing the homosexual nature of Sodom's sin, we will look more closely at his text, something which neither author did because their discipline requires that they focus on the biblical writers. It is surprising to discover that Damian's text contains much more contemporaneous psychology. This leads us to question current theories on the recent origin of a gay person with his or her own identity. Without attempting to rewrite gay history, we will end with a call for further research in that field.

Biblical Scholars, Scriptural Authority and Sexuality

While reading the exegetic literature on Sodom, I became increasingly puzzled by the way in which history seems to be an ambivalent authority in the minds of many biblical scholars. Of course, this topic is not new. It is generally known that

4. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1955; Gijs Bouwman, *De zonde van Sodom. Ontstaan en verstaan van een bijbelverhaal* [Sodom's Sin. Origin and Understanding of a Biblical Story], Hilversum, Gooi en Sticht, 1990.

Protestantism used the authority of the Bible to rebuff papal claims to define religious truth. For these reasons, nineteenth-century biblical studies constituted a far greater fundamental threat to Protestantism than to Catholicism because they demonstrated that many biblical texts were not reliable historical accounts. One cannot help but smile when recalling the schisms that have occurred in fundamentalist groups following controversies such as 'the snake in Paradise': did the animal really speak in Hebrew to Adam and Eve? It is equally astonishing that, even today, some people believe that the walls of Jericho collapsed when the trumpets sounded, while others are still hopeful that they will find the remnants of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat. Luckily, these beliefs are marginal. Mainstream theology, whether Protestant or Catholic, has learned to deal with the fact that the Bible is not a historical account. Scriptural authority must be understood in a different way.

But *how* should it be understood? This question is the next logical step, but a closer examination is frequently hampered by the fact that biblical scholarship has become a separate profession and has severed most of its ties with dogmatics. In the past, biblical scholars worked within a broad ecumenical context and sometimes in a non-denominational context. This does not mean that there is no theological discourse on the subject of biblical authority. The subject is, however, seldom discussed among biblical scholars. They avoid theological, ecclesiastical and denominational motives that could divide the profession, and largely confine themselves to what will establish their reputations, even in the eyes of outsiders: science and hard facts. With the exception of those devoted to narratology and structural reading, biblical scholars deal mainly with the facts underlying the text or with historical facts excavated from a desert.

The philosophy of history in particular seems to be taboo among professional exegetes. This does not mean that scholars are unaware of the importance of establishing the precise historical context of the texts they study. On the contrary, most of their work involves disentangling, layer by layer, the constitution of a transmitted text and assigning a precise historical context to each redaction. However, when we come to deal with our relationship to this historical past, which has been so carefully reconstructed, tensions that are clearly related to the authority of the text as a text from the past become apparent. In the two examples we will discuss, the scholars dealing with Sodom's sin attempt to demonstrate that, because the modern concept of homosexuality was unknown to the writers of the Bible, the holy text cannot be used as an argument to condemn gays in modern-day society. Is the underlying message that *if* homosexuality had been known to them, then obviously scriptural authority should be taken into account? This is seldom explicitly stated. Obviously, one wants to avoid re-

enacting the Catholic-Protestant controversy on evolving revelation. The famous nineteenth-century polemic between A. von Harnack and A. Loisy should be forgotten. Meanwhile, the basic question in contemporaneous studies on sex and gender is ignored: do we need to understand the continuities and discontinuities in our cultural history in order to understand and deal with our desires in a more liberal and reasonable way? The answer is obviously yes. Scholars of sex and gender might find biblical scholarship very relevant. Unfortunately, because they are afraid of a discussion on revelation, biblical scholars do not dare to enter into what might be a fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration.

Epur si muove... Before reaching the point at which I could question this exegetic taboo on the philosophy of history on a more abstract and theoretical level, I was confronted with a much simpler problem that posed the same question in a very concrete way. What exactly is sodomy? Of course, most people link Sodom's sin with something sexual. But which variety of sex? Having a Catholic background myself, and having been closely involved in moral theology, it seemed obvious to me that sexual intercourse between men was the issue, more precisely: anal penetration. The traditional Catholic doctrine is to be found in the almost identical classical manuals that appeared between the eighteenth century and the early 1950s. One example is the very popular work by H. Jone. We can smile at the fact that, although both the book and its translations are written in modern language, the text shifts to Latin when sex is discussed explicitly. But there is no doubt: sodomy is anal intercourse, whether with a man (perfect sodomy) or with a woman (imperfect sodomy):⁵

‘Sodomia est concubitus cum persona ejusdem sexus (sodomia perfecta) vel diversi sexus sed in vase praepostero (sodomia imperfecta).’

Surprisingly, this is not generally understood, particularly in Protestantism. Although the official Dutch translation of the Bible, the *Statenvertaling*, clearly depicts Sodom's sin as intercourse between men, the meaning has clearly shifted. In many dictionaries, especially those of the Germanic languages, ‘sodomy’ is defined as bestiality. This is also what many of my students thought when I discussed sodomy. Is this not curious? The denominations that are supposed to be the better readers of the Bible link Sodom with bestiality, whereas a careful reader of the text can discover no chicken, goat or cow in the text. This reinforced my view of the importance of questioning history: how can one understand the fact that a biblical story, in which there are perhaps not ‘gays’ but

5. H. Jone, *Katholische Moralthologie*, Paderborn, Schönengh, 15th ed.: 1953, no. 230, p. 190-191. Among the many, see for a similar definition A. Lehmkuhl, *Theologia moralis*, Freiburg, Herder, 11th ed.: 1940, no. 1045, p. 588.

in any case sexual intercourse between males, could evolve into a story portraying intercourse with an animal?

Biblical scholars might well reply: 'This is an interesting problem, but it is not our task to deal with it. We just do what other historians do. We collect facts on a limited historical period and present the past as objectively as possible!' Although this is conceivable to a certain extent, it implies that biblical scholarship becomes pure History (where many of the same problems remain unresolved) and would cease to be part of theology as the overarching endeavour to understand Western religious tradition. I, in any case, do not regard this as progress.

But even if one claims to limit oneself to being a historian, ideology may still be involved. When biblical scholars state that later authors have changed the meaning of the biblical message, they risk suggesting that this later shift is unimportant and draw the focus away from this later phase of development. This has happened with the author who is a landmark in the history of homosexuality: Peter Damian. Accused of misunderstanding the Bible, Peter Damian's work was not read and his influence has been underestimated. The unspoken ideology has worked: the Bible remains the focus of research, not cultural history with its shifting interpretations.

Bailey's Desexualization of Sodom

In order to discuss the matter in a more concrete way, we will look more closely at two scholars who do not hesitate to admit that they study the Bible in the explicit context of a moral evaluation of homosexuality: D.S. Bailey and G. Bouwman. We should not forget, however, that their works derive from quite different socio-cultural backgrounds. Bailey's book reflects the first attempts of the Church of England to lift the taboo on homosexuality. For today's readers, his text may sound rather cautious – almost too cautious. We should remember, however, that the 1885 law condemning homosexual acts, even those performed in private by consenting adults, was still in force in Great Britain in 1955. Anal penetration in particular, either with a man or a woman, was considered a crime under various Anglo-Saxon laws. Bouwman's book was written 35 years later in the Catholic part of the Netherlands, at a time when discrimination against homosexuals seemed to be coming to an end. Statements from the Vatican on sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, greatly upset Dutch Catholics.

How different their backgrounds may be, the books remain interesting. They are among the few works written by biblical scholars that deal at length with the sexual meaning of Sodom's story. The authors do not attempt to conceal the fact

that biblical scholarship is practised in order to reach practical conclusions on religion and morals.

Bailey's book begins with the statement that homosexual inclination should be distinguished from homosexual acts. He specifies that the term 'perverse' should not be applied to a homosexual inclination, but only to sexual acts performed by someone without a homosexual inclination (p. XI):

The *pervert*, as the term implies, is not a true homosexual, but a heterosexual who engages in homosexual practices. He may do this casually, from motives of curiosity or in exceptional circumstances; or habitually, as a prostitute or in pursuit of novel sexual experiences; he may alternate between homosexual and heterosexual activities, or he may confine himself to one of the other for long periods.

Bailey does not explain why this distinction is important to him. One can suppose that this is a matter of Church politics. The cautious acceptance of the homosexual as a person should not result in approval of homosexual acts – a view still held by the Vatican today. After his initial statement, Bailey proceeds to his interpretation of the Sodom story, in which his reasoning seems to agree with what many scholars would say today, even if their exegesis is less explicitly directed towards practical consequences.

Let us examine Bailey's explanation. According to the Hebrew text of the Sodom story, the inhabitants came to the house of Lot, who had given hospitality to the two visitors, and urged him to bring them outside so that they could 'know' them. The verb used is *yadah*, a verb that can, but does not always, have a sexual meaning. Bailey asserts that the verb does not have a sexual meaning here. The story can be understood as follows. Lot was a foreigner in Sodom and probably lost the sympathy of the inhabitants through his arrogant behaviour. People became suspicious when they heard that he had brought strangers to the place. The strangers might have had hostile intentions, so the people wanted to know who they were. Of course, Bailey's explanation has to deal with the fact that Lot offers his daughters (who had not yet 'known' a man) to the menacing multitude instead of the men. According to Bailey, however, this has nothing to do with proposing a heterosexual object instead of a homosexual one. It could simply be an act of despair (p. 6):

No doubt surrender of his daughters was simply the most tempting bribe that Lot could offer on the spur of the moment to appease the hostile crowd; and the fact that he could contemplate such a desperate course may well indicate his anxiety at all costs to extricate himself from a situation which he had precipitated (as already suggested) by action incompatible with his status in Sodom as a *ger*.

Bailey continues by reviewing the Bible and Apocrypha in order to see whether any homosexual meaning has been attached to the Sodom story. He concludes that the canonical Old Testament contains no evidence. Sodom is regarded as a sinful city, but homosexuality is not mentioned. Conversely, no reference is made to Sodom in the biblical texts dealing with homosexuality (i.e. intercourse between men). The sexualization of the Sodom story does not begin until the book of Jubilees. Jub. 16, 5-6 says 'they commit fornication in their flesh' and Jub. 20, 5-6 assimilates the sins of Sodom with those of the giants, whose sins introduce the story of the Flood in Gen. 6, 1-4. However, this does not imply that the Sodomites were guilty of *homosexual* intercourse, but this next step in the interpretation can be found in the Testament of Naphtali, one of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. There it is said that the people of Sodom 'changed the natural order of things'. If this still sounds ambiguous, Philo leaves no doubt in the reader's mind. He clearly interprets the term 'knowing' (*yadha*) as 'servile, lawless and unseemly pederasty' (p. 21) and, according to Bailey, he is the first to do so. In Bailey's view, Philo's description of Sodom appears to owe more to his knowledge of Alexandria's debauchery than to the Bible, especially when he writes in *De Abrahamo* (26, 134-136, quoted p. 22):

...they threw off from their necks the law of nature, and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse. Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbours, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive; and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered incapable of any but sterile seed.

According to Bailey, the Sodom story was not associated with homosexuality until the first century BC, obviously under the influence of Greek pederasty. In the subsequent chapters of his book, he continues his historical investigations, listing the Fathers, demonstrating the influence of Roman and German law, and placing the crystallisation of consensus concerning the sinfulness of homosexual practices in the Middle Ages. According to him, Peter Damian is the most extreme spokesman, but perhaps not representative. It is due to the impact of this historical development that the theme of homosexuality was projected onto the Sodom story, which, according to Bailey, initially had nothing to do with it.

It is not our purpose to discuss all the historical evidence presented by Bailey in these chapters. Let us just comment on an essential point. According to Bailey, Peter Damian is a final landmark. In his work we find the final version of Western views on sodomy, to which subsequent centuries make no essential contribution. We will return to this point later.

Meanwhile, Bailey's conclusions are clear. The Sodom story cannot be used to condemn homosexuality because it does not refer to gay people in the modern sense of the word. Neither do other texts (e.g. Paul in Rom. 1, 27, 1 Cor. 6, 9-10, 1 Tim. 1, 9-10) show an awareness of the existence of a real, possibly innate, homosexual disposition. They could, therefore, only address homosexual perversion, i.e. homosexual acts committed by non-homosexuals. Bailey's conclusion is obvious: in order to evaluate modern homosexuality in a humane and dispassionate way, we should not use the Bible as an argument. Further research and greater insight are required.

Looking back at Bailey's arguments, the tension in the text continues to puzzle. If it were true that the biblical authors could not possibly discern 'our' homosexuality, why did Bailey need to argue at such length that Sodom's sin was *not* sexual, and why did he so curiously insist on the fact that *jada* means simply 'to know' in the Sodom story? Even if the Sodomites engaged in homosexual intercourse, that would not affect the moral evaluation of gay people in our own time because the biblical writers were not acquainted with the phenomenon. Why then, in spite of this, was there such a fervent attempt to prove that Sodom's sin was *not* related to sex? Bailey uses two distinct arguments that weaken rather than strengthen each other. His noble intention to rescue 'people who are different' seems to conflict with an ambivalent adherence to scriptural authority.

Another difficult point is his statement that, with Peter Damian, the final stage of the distortion of the tradition in order to condemn homosexuality has been reached. This laconic statement contrasts greatly with the care put into the study of biblical texts – even if we have to disagree with the results. But this seems also to be a message to the reader: the turning points in cultural history are less important than the original biblical statements. From a historical point of view, this implicit message is perhaps the opposite of the truth: whether one likes it or not, Peter Damian probably indicates a more important turning point in the cultural history of sex than many people would like. But before discussing his work we will discuss another biblical scholar.

Bouwman's Heterosexualization of the Sodom Story

G. Bouwman's book was written in 1990 and stems from a Catholic background. It reflects not only the adoption of new directions in biblical studies – the German trend of *Quellenforschung*, *Traditionsgeschichte*, *Redaktionsgeschichte* and *Wirkungsgeschichte* had become generally accepted – but also the newer, tolerant, and even sympathetic views on homosexuality that were disseminated under the pioneering influence of the Netherlands.

Since memories are short and subsequent generations will find them hard to believe, let us recall some basic facts. For centuries, in fact since the Council of Trent, Catholic moral teaching was curiously based on a vague theory of natural law. The Bible appeared only in quotations in order to embellish the text, but the theoretical basis for moral judgment was: respect the order established by the Creation, an order that the human intellect can decipher. The teachings of Thomas Aquinas, which were initially treated with suspicion, had become more or less standard since the sixteenth century, despite the fact that there had been many shifts in the interpretation of his views. The great French *Nouvelle théologie* debate in the mid-twentieth century was based on attempts to understand his thinking correctly.

This had direct implications for sexual morals. Every sexual act not fit for procreation was considered as 'being against nature' and therefore prohibited. Some moral textbooks found such acts, ranging from masturbation to bestiality,⁶ worse than rape, for in the latter case the 'normal' sexual form of behaviour was respected. Needless to say, contraception was forbidden according to that view.

As the theory was consistently to be found in every textbook, no special Vatican declarations on sexual matters appeared to be necessary. This situation changed in 1930, when the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church declared on 14 August that contraception was *not* to be considered sinful. Immediately, with unusual haste, the Vatican replied with the Encyclical *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930) and took the opposite view. Even the new 'rhythm method' of Ogino-Knauss, which involved calculating the woman's fertile period and planning sexual intercourse accordingly, was banned. Rather curious rules were proclaimed and Catholic hospitals were urged to adhere to them. When masculine sperm had to be examined, it had to be obtained by using a condom during normal sexual intercourse. In order to respect natural law, the condom had to have a small hole...⁷

Confronted with this obsolete way of thinking, and in an attempt to put an end to practices that began to look rather ridiculous, many moral theologians began to attack the uncritical and simplistic use of the category 'moral law'. The issue of contraception was the spearhead in their struggle for a new and more relevant

6. It is interesting to know that sexual intercourse with the devil was considered to be a form of bestiality, i.e. sexual intercourse with a different species in the order of creation. Surprisingly, to my knowledge, sexual intercourse with angels was not discussed.

7. On the issue of contraception, see John Th. Noonan, *Contraception. A history of its treatment by Catholic theologians and canonists*, Harvard University Press, 1965. For a more general overview, see S.H. Pfürtnner, *Kirche und Sexualität*, (Rororo Taschenbücher 8039) Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1972.

Catholic moral theology. The first battle appeared to have been won in 1951, when Pope Pius XII accepted the rhythm method as a licit way of determining the number of children Catholics should bring into the world.⁸ Nearly everyone expected the issue of contraception to be resolved, along with the issue of priesthood celibacy, at the second Vatican Council. Unfortunately, the two themes were withdrawn from the Council's agenda and a subsequent papal decision took the opposite view to what was broadly expected. Celibacy was confirmed with the papal Encyclical *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* (1967), while *Humanae vitae* (1968) maintained the prohibition on contraception, with the exception of the rhythm method.

Meanwhile, Dutch gays were becoming emancipated, and many theologians were sympathetic to their cause. Protestants were the first to express that sympathy with the small book *De homoseksuele naaste* [The Homosexual Neighbour]⁹, and the Catholics were quick to follow suit. The three articles on 'The Problem of the Homophile Neighbour', published in the important Dutch-Flemish journal *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, stated in turn that no moral objection could be raised against homosexuality as such.¹⁰ This was followed by many publications in the Netherlands as well as abroad. The most famous of these were M. Oraison's *La question homosexuelle* (1975)¹¹, John Mc Neill's *The Church and the Homosexual* (1976)¹², and G. Ménard's *De Sodome à l'Exode* (1980).¹³

Meanwhile, the Vatican had reacted, although this had taken a long time. Naturally, according to the old textbooks, homosexuality was a *vitium contra naturam*, but once it was admitted that sex could be for pleasure only – even in the very restricted case of the rhythm method – a new perspective could have been expected. But in 1975, *Persona humana*, a Vatican document deriving from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, condemned homosexual acts, masturbation and premarital sex. This statement was reinforced by the Vatican guidelines for pastorals with homosexuals in their congregations (1986), promulgated by the same Congregation. Both were signed by Cardinal Ratzinger.¹⁴

8. Address of 29 August 1951 to the Italian Catholic Society of Midwives. See Noonan, *Contraception*, op cit., 446.

9. A.L. Janse de Jonge et al., *De homoseksuele naaste*, Baarn, Bosch & Keuning, 1961.

10. W. Sengers, J. Gottschalk, Th. Beemer, 'De vraag van de homofiele medemens', *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 7 (1967) 141-175.

11. M. Oraison, *La question homosexuelle*, Paris, Seuil, 1975.

12. John Mc Neill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, Kansas City, Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1976.

13. G. Ménard, *De Sodome à l'Exode. Jalons pour une théologie gaie*, Montréal, Univers, 1980.

14. For further details, see J. Gramick & P. Furey, *The Vatican and Homosexuality*, New York, Crossroads, 1988.

In line with Catholic tradition, the Bible was not the foundation for moral reasoning. The Sodom story was referred to nevertheless. Being a biblical scholar and a caring theologian, Bouwman was clearly upset by the arbitrary reference to the biblical source and by the unequivocal discrimination against homosexuals. He claimed that they are still treated in the same way as the foreigners in Sodom who did not receive hospitality. With humour and irony, he dispassionately explained in his book what biblical scholarship could say on the subject. He did not write only for the 'in-crowd'. His writing is clear enough for a layperson to comprehend the pertinence of biblical scholarship.

Essentially, Bouwman challenged Bailey's statement that the wish of Sodom's inhabitants to 'know' (*yadah*) the foreigners had no sexual meaning. The same verb occurs a few lines further on, referring to Lot's daughters, and in this case the meaning is undoubtedly sexual. However sympathetic Bailey may be to the homosexuals' cause, one should recognize that apologetics took him too far. But if, according to Bouwman, Sodom's sin is a sexual one, this does not imply that it is *homosexual*.

By deconstructing the text layer by layer, Bouwman finally arrives at the following hypothesis. Originally, the purpose of the Sodom story was to condemn human *hubris*. The inhabitants wanted to engage in sexual intercourse with heavenly beings in order to become gods themselves. In this sense, one can understand why many biblical and post-biblical texts have linked the Sodom story to that of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Man with which the Flood is introduced. In both cases there is an attempt to transcend the human condition through a *hieros gamos*. Seeking to be equal to God is also the theme of another Jahwist story, that of Babel. Bouwman found some truth in the hypothesis that the oldest version of the Sodom story deals with human *hubris*. And, of course, in all these cases, *hubris* must be punished.

The first redactor of what would become our Bible, the 'Jahwist', included the Sodom story in the Abraham cycle. Consequently, the theme of the *hieros gamos* disappeared and was replaced by the theme of hospitality, an essential value in nomad culture: refusing hospitality to a foreigner means letting him die. One could even suspect that the emphasis on hospitality reinforced in turn the same theme in the story in the previous chapter about Abraham receiving guests, which slightly overshadows the essence of that story, namely the birth of Isaac.¹⁵ The subsequent reception of the Sodom story in Rabbinic and Christian circles continued to emphasise the theme of hospitality. Here, Bouwman refutes Bailey's opinion that the influence of some of the apocrypha and Philo might have been

15. Bouwman summarises his views on p. 52.

decisive in the early Christian reinterpretation of the story in the direction of homosexuality. While not denying the existence of the texts quoted by Bailey, Bouwman is convinced that their influence was only marginal, and he supports this claim by reviewing some of the most important Fathers. Origen does not link Sodom with homosexuality, while Augustine and John Chrysostom do so only once, which is insignificant in terms of the immense volume of work they produced. Even in these individual cases, the emphasis is on the lack of hospitality.

There is, of course, one difficult point in Bailey's hypothesis and Bouwman is aware of it. Claiming that a *hieros gamos* is at issue in the case of the Flood and Sodom is not unproblematic. In the former case, this would involve ordinary heterosexual intercourse, and homosexual intercourse in the latter case. However, the explanation could be that the oldest layers of the Bible reflect a matriarchal structure. Looking more closely at the story of the Flood, one sees that it is not the Sons of God, but the Daughters of Men who are punished as if they had taken the initiative to seduce the gods in order to appropriate their divine powers. Could it not be that the most ancient strata of the Sodom story reflect the same situation, i.e. that the *women* of Sodom wanted to have intercourse with the divine strangers? When the first, more patriarchal, redaction was made to what would later become the Bible, the women were of course replaced by men.

Reflecting on Bouwman's reasoning, one wonders if the redactor could have changed heterosexual intercourse into homosexual intercourse without any problem, or even without noticing. If this were true, it would not only mean that the writer was so indifferent to intercourse between males that he could use it to harmonize his text when transposing it from a matriarchal to a patriarchal framework, it would also mean that, with this shift, the psychological meaning of attaining godliness is preserved. From a psychological point of view, this is hardly believable. If it were true, this tacit shift would say much more about the Bible's basic conceptions on sexuality than many lengthy exegetic discourses on other explicit biblical texts relating to sex.

Another point that requires further investigation is Bouwman's statement that the Early Church did not link homosexuality to the Sodom story. According to Bouwman, this link did not appear until later, probably in monastic circles, where the peculiarity of men living together made the repression of sexual tendencies compulsory. But there is little historical material to support this line of reasoning. As in Bailey's case, Peter Damian is presented as the key figure and final milestone in the homosexualization of the Sodom story. Just as in Bailey's book, Damian's views are not discussed in detail, as if they were a 'deviation' and not an interesting turning point in our understanding of modern sexuality. For us today,

interested as we are in how the present derives from the past by changing it, and wanting to understand the historical evolution of our sexuality, Peter Damian's work could be very interesting. Let us explore his texts a little.

Peter, beloved brother of Damian

Peter Damian's Latin name is Petrus Damiani, the last word being a genitive: Peter of Damian. Damian was Peter's brother. It is curious that so little attention has been paid to that detail, but a name is never a minor detail in a man's life.¹⁶

The story of the youth of Peter Damian (1007-1072) appeals to the psychoanalytical mind. Having many children already, Peter's mother was not pleased when she conceived Peter. She did not take care of the baby, and he was almost abandoned until a priest's wife took charge of him. Later, his brother Damian looked after him and managed to provide him with an excellent education. Curiously, the man who was rescued by a priest's wife and added his brother's name to his own was a fierce persecutor of priests who lived with women – even if they were legally married – and of clergy addicted to 'sodomy'. We should immediately add that those facts do not allow us to make a psychoanalytical diagnosis of the historical Peter Damian; we cannot ask him to explain his personal history from the analyst's couch. Nevertheless, the story of Peter Damian as it has been told contains a complexity of specific data that appeal to the mind. This could provide insight into how tradition has conveyed specific fantasies relating to homosexuality.

In 1035, having completed his studies, Peter Damian joined the monastic order of Fonte-Avellana and was rapidly chosen to become the prior. Persuaded that the dissolute lifestyle of the clergy needed reform, he took part in many synods and advocated drastic reforms. In 1058, despite his initial refusal, Pope Stephen IX compelled him to become Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia. Many times he was appointed papal legate in many local councils. His embassy to Milan (1059) was especially important. The local bishop, William de Velate, was not reluctant to accept priests living with a wife. One should not forget that celibacy was not yet

16. The main facts about Peter Damian's life can be found in the introduction to the critical edition of his work by K. Reindel: *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Munich, 4 vol., 1983, 1988, 1989, 1993. An English translation is in the making: *The Letters of Peter Damian* (transl. Owen J. Blum), The Fathers of the Church (Mediaeval Continuation), Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1998, (4 vols. already published, up to letter 120). See also the study by Fr. Dressler, *Petrus Damiani. Leben und Werk* (Studia Anselmiana 34), Rome, Herder, 1954, and a shorter book by J. Leclercq, *Saint Pierre Damien, ermite et homme d'Église*, Rome, Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1960.

firmly established. Although religious custom was in favour of celibacy, many clerics were officially married. If their marriage was regarded by many as unauthorized, it was nevertheless valid once it had been consummated. Once married, a priest had no right to send his wife away. So there was a significant movement to bring canon law, which was not completely clear on the matter, in line with practice. The conduct of William de Velate was therefore not surprising. It was not until 1139, with Lateran II, that a cleric's marriage, from subdiaconate onwards, came to be regarded as invalid.¹⁷ Peter Damian, however, did not witness the eventual success of his campaign.

The text that interests us here has nothing to do with celibacy but with sodomy. The text is known as the *Liber Gommothianus* (1049). It is in fact a letter sent to Pope Leo IX, the reply to which precedes Damian's text in many manuscripts.¹⁸ At this time, Peter was still a monk at Fonte-Avellana and one wonders why he was so preoccupied with the lifestyle of secular clerics. In any case, what upset Peter was his impression that the new vice of 'sodomy' was spreading among the clergy at the time, and there was a general tendency to be rather lenient towards it. The question seemed to be: 'Holy Father, if we do not accept gay people, who will be here to perform the sacred liturgy?'. We are neither in 2002 nor in the United States, but in eleventh-century Italy. The problem, of course, is whether 'sodomy' equals 'homosexuality' when Peter Damian states (no. 13):

But perhaps someone will say that necessity demands and that no one is present who can celebrate divine services in the Church; consequently, the decision, which, as justice required, was at first appropriate severe, is now softened in the face of practical necessity.

Luckily for the scholar, Peter Damian's definition of sodomy is very clear. Time and again he repeats that the term covers four different types of sin: 'There are some who pollute themselves, there are others who befoul one another by mutual handling of their genitals; others still fornicate between the thighs; and others who do this from the rear' (no. 8). He criticizes the fact that attention is focussed on the latter, while people addicted to the other three retain their positions as clerics.

Thus, having fulminated against the excessively lenient treatment of vice, and having stated that the difficulty in recruiting clergy cannot excuse this tolerance, Peter quotes Paul in Rom. 1, 24 and elaborates on the blindness contracted by the inhabitants of Sodom (nr. 15-18). As a consequence of committing

17. J. de Chasteigner, 'Le célibat sacerdotal dans les écrits de saint Pierre Damien', *Doctor Communis* XXIV (1971), III pp. 169-183 & IV pp. 261-278.

18. Letter 31 in the Reindel and Owen editions.

the sin, one loses both moral judgement and the spirit required to understand the scriptures. Just as the inhabitants of Sodom were blinded by the angels and were unable to find the door, so clerics who engage in the practices are also unable to find the door that is Christ: '...they wander about in circles, dizzied by the maddening rotation' (no. 17).

After this general statement on sodomy, Peter Damian deals with individual cases. The first is that of bishops committing the sin with their spiritual sons, i.e. with someone they have ordained. The argument is that performing sodomy with someone hampers their development. Ordination is after all a spiritual way of begetting. A bishop should therefore raise the boys he ordains into manhood. Committing sodomy with them reduces them to the status of women (no. 19):

Who will make a mistress of a cleric, or a woman of a man? Who, by his lust, will consign a son whom he has spiritually begotten for God to slavery under the iron law of satanic tyranny?

Continuing the paternal metaphor, Peter Damian refers to godfathers, who are not allowed to marry the girls they have brought to baptism. He also refers to incest. He continues the line of reasoning: committing sodomy with someone one has ordained is like incest, but is even worse because the natural order is also violated in the former case (no. 20). This form of sodomy, associated with incest in a father-son relationship, is obviously disturbing to Peter Damian's mind. After denouncing sodomite clerics who confess their sins to each other (nos. 21-23), and after stating that, if a monk can be sent away for having sex with a nun, this should equally apply to a cleric who commits sodomy (a strange deviation in his reasoning) (no. 24), he returns to the topic of spiritual incest. He reiterates that, as is the case with baptism, confession establishes a father-son relationship.

This ends the basic arguments. In the section that follows, Peter Damian discusses many penitentials defining penance for various sexual sins, and he warns sodomites against referring to less reliable sources when searching for more lenient verdicts. How can one trust the authenticity of canons prescribing ten years of penance to those who fornicate with cattle or draught animals, but only five years to a priest, three to a deacon and two to a cleric, etc.? (no. 31) We know that other canons impose five years' penance on a priest who sins with a nun, and those canons are without doubt authentic. The canons of the Council of Ancyra were even more severe. Elaborating on those 'who have committed acts of bestiality or have polluted others with the leprosy of unnatural vice, must pray among those possessed by an unclean spirit', he repeats that sodomites are neither aware of their own sinful condition nor of the fact that they are actually possessed by the devil.

Peter Damian quotes even harsher texts. Addressing monks living in the desert, Basil says (no. 38):¹⁹

Any cleric or monk who seduces young men or boys, or who is apprehended in kissing or in any shameful situation, shall be publicly flogged and shall lose his clerical tonsure. Thus shorn, he shall be disgraced by spitting into his face, bound in iron chains, wasted by six months of close confinement, and for three days each week put on barley bread given him toward evening. Following this period, he shall spend a further six months living in a small segregated courtyard in the custody of a spiritual elder, subjected to vigils and prayers, forced to walk at all times in the company of two spiritual brothers, never again allowed to associate with young men for purposes of improper conversation or advice. If this was originally the tradition, the most lenient canons must be really unreliable!

Peter Damian thus implores the sodomites to become aware of the urgency of their situation (nos. 41-49), for 'Unquestionably, this vice, since it surpasses the enormity of all others, is impossible to compare with any other vice' (no. 41). Essentially, it impedes any other virtue and blinds the sodomite: 'Once this serpent has sunk its fangs into this unfortunate man, he is deprived of all moral sense, his memory fails, and the mind's vision is darkened' (no. 42). But, suddenly, in the midst of an extensive list of decay resulting from sodomy, the curious image of a woman attracts our attention: all this is the result of the influence of the queen of Sodom (no. 42):

This utterly diseased queen of Sodom renders him who obeys the laws of her tyranny infamous to men and odious to God. She mobilizes him in the militia of the evil spirit and forces him to fight unspeakable wars against God. ...

The text continues in this way, attributing all the previously mentioned evils to this strange, seductive queen.

A rhetorical lamentation follows, in which Peter Damian weeps for the unhappy soul. However, underlying his Christian compassion there is aggression. Peter Damian cannot accept that the sodomite is not ashamed of his crime and does not withdraw from the cleric's status. As if he were familiar with modern-day language, he sneers at the sodomite who seems to apply the following biblical text to his own condition: 'I am a queen on my throne and I am no widow' (no. 45, the text is Apoc. 18, 7 referring to Babylon). Here we have another queen. Then, suddenly, putting aside the religious arguments, Peter Damian exclaims (no. 46):

Tell us, you unmanly and effeminate man, what do you seek in another male that you do not find in yourself? What difference in sex, what varied features of the

19. According to Blum, the source is Burchard, *Decretum* 17,35.

body? What tenderness, what softness of sensual charm? What smooth and delightful face? Male virility, I say, should terrify you, and you should shudder at the sight of manly limbs. For it is the function of the natural appetite that each should seek outside himself what he cannot find within his own capacity. Therefore, if the touch of masculine flesh delights you, lay your hands upon yourself and be assured that whatever you do not find in yourself, you seek in vain in the body of another. Woe to you, unhappy soul, at whose death angels weep and the enemy scoffingly applauds.'

The 'humble monk'²⁰ continues to sneer at the pride of the sodomite, who does not admit that he is like someone suffering from the plague and gonorrhoea. He suggests an etymological link between 'gonorrhoea' and 'Gomorrah' and he steadily reiterates: 'Shame on your pretentious pride' (no. 49). He almost boasts that the services of an unworthy priest will spell ruin for the people.

But did Peter Damian go too far? We can imagine readers finding his fulminations exaggerated, particularly bearing in mind his definition of sodomy as a sin ranging from solitary masturbation to anal intercourse. But Peter Damian is not impressed, and he insists that all four practices are sodomy to the same extent: 'The serpent we have sought to crush is four-headed, and whichever head it bites, it at once spews forth all its vicious poison' (no. 59). He recalls the story of a hermit living a seemingly perfect, saintly life except for one thing: he thought he was allowed to calm his sexual desires by simple masturbation, in order to free his mind for further prayer. On his death, he was carried away by the devil. Peter jumps to this conclusion (no. 60):

Therefore, if one defiles himself, or is convicted of sinning with another by touch, by femoral coitus, or by violating him from the rear, even if he does not indulge in these practices indiscriminately, he is, without doubt, still guilty of the crime of sodomy. We do not read that the natives of Sodom practised posterior intercourse only with strangers; more likely we can be sure that, given the urge of their unbridled lust, they indulged in various shameless methods on themselves as well on others.

Referring to the Sodom story, Peter Damian once more exhorts sodomites to change their lives and, especially, to renounce sacred orders. God's fire and sword should warn them, but also their own narcissism, as we would say today. Is Peter Damian aware of some of the striking narcissistic characteristics of gays? In any case, having pointed to the punishment in Hell, as if this were not enough, he depicts the decomposition of a handsome body (nr. 67):

20. In reference to the title of this work: 'The book of Gomorrah by the humble monk, Peter Damian' (nos. 5-6).

Consider, moreover, that the poison now causing such a intolerable stench, that the corrupting matter that breeds and nourishes worms, that everything laying there in arid dust or ashes was once thriving flesh that in its prime sustained passion like this. Notice finally the rigid sinews, the naked teeth, the disassembled array of joints and bones, the arrangement of all the members in horrible disarray. Thus, indeed, does the horror of this formless and confused vision dispel illusions from the heart of man. Think again of the peril of exchange, that for a momentary pleasure experienced at the moment of ejaculation, a punishment will follow that will not end for a thousand years.'

The book ends by asserting the rewards of chastity and by apologizing in case parts of the writer's text were too offensive *ad pias aures*. Peter Damian is nonetheless convinced that it would be an even more serious crime not to warn his brothers of the danger lurking. The book ends with a solemn appeal to the Pope to officially declare which types of sodomites should be excluded from the clergy; the answer Peter Damian is clearly hoping for is: all of them.

But popes can be surprisingly indulgent. In his answer, usually referred to as *Sed nos humanius agentes*, although these are not the first words of the text, Leo IX began with some kind words to Peter Damian. Of course he appreciated that Peter was 'motivated by sacred fury to write what seemed appropriate' (no. 3). However, he adhered to the most lenient view that only those who were completely addicted to the practice of masturbation or of intercourse between the thighs or, even worse, those who 'have sunk to the level of anal intercourse', should lose their clerical status (no. 4). We do not know whether this answer to the *Liber Gomorrhianus* introduced a new code of discipline. Nor do we know whether a clergy besmirched with sodomy was a reality or just a nightmare originating in the psyche of Damian's beloved brother.

Conclusions and further questions

Both biblical scholars dealing with the Sodom story affirm that it originally had no homosexual meaning. We have seen that, in both cases, difficulties remain. Bailey has yet to explain why he believes that *yadah* 'simply means coming to know who the foreigners are, while, a few lines further on, the *knowing* of Lot's daughters is undeniably sexual. And if Bouwman's hypothesis of a primal matriarchal layer in the text is correct, i.e. that the women of Sodom wanted to acquire divine power through intercourse with divine beings, it is difficult to believe that the replacement of women by men in the patriarchal redaction of the text has not raised problems in a biblical corpus where intercourse between men is otherwise condemned. But I admit that this could be our preconception.

Both Bailey and Bouwman conclude from their survey of the post-biblical literature that the homosexualization of sodomy occurred fairly late. It took place under the influence of Greek pederasty (although K.J. Dover's classic work assigns a limited space of time, from the sixth to the fourth century BC, to the acceptance of that practice²¹) or under the influence of monastic life. Both writers claim that the *Liber gommorhianus* testifies that, at the beginning of the second millennium, sodomy was already associated with homosexuality. This tradition influenced later readers of the Bible, and even biblical scholars projected this onto their treatment of the original tradition.

A related step in the reasoning is the claim that the writers of the Bible were not acquainted with the homosexual inclinations and feelings we recognize today. Thus the Bible cannot condemn 'our' homosexuality. This insight may be of comfort to people who still take the biblical text to be a direct authority that need not be mediated. For these people, Peter Damian is just a warning voice against incorrect interpretations of the Bible.

For others who are less concerned with the original meaning of the Bible, and more interested in how cultural history has shaped our behaviour and desires, Peter Damian is a very interesting milestone. We would like to know more about him or, better still, about the era and mentality he represents. This would allow us a better understanding of our cultural history and of ourselves, just as lying on the analyst's couch can relieve an individual of his personal past, so historical research can cure our collective cultural determinations.²²

Since M. Foucault's first book on sexuality,²³ we have become used to thinking that the invention of a specific sexual inclination linked with a peculiar psychology was something that originated in the nineteenth century. Today, several decades later, we can see the different lifestyles adopted in the gay milieu, where there are not only homosexuals, but aesthetes, drag queens, leather boys and bears. They are often so different from each other that you could ask whether 'homosexuality' is really a general concept, or simply a signifier bringing together a polymorphous crowd.

21. K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Duckworth, London, 1978.

22. 'The ultimate aim of all this, according to Foucault, is to diagnose the present, for history is a "curative science". And "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit ourselves to its dissipation", to refute those categorisations that are imposed upon us as truth. Clearly an approach such as this radically challenges any general theory of history and of society.' Jeffrey Weeks, *Against nature. Essays on history, sexuality and identity*, London, Rivers Oram Press, 1991, p. 161.

23. M. Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, (Histoire de la sexualité, vol.1), Parijs, Gallimard, 1976. Engl. tr.: *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1: *An Introduction*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1978.

In line with Foucault's reasoning, I have often maintained the view that the linking of sexual preferences with a specific type of sexuality is a modern phenomenon. A seminar given on Alphonsus Liguori confirmed this view. Before him, as I mentioned above, moral theology distinguished between *sodomia imperfecta* (i.e. anal intercourse between a man with a woman) and *sodomia perfecta* (i.e. anal intercourse between men). Thus the anatomy of the act was the primary criterion, while the person with whom it was carried out was only secondary. Liguori changed this view. For him, the basic question was 'with whom?', and only subsequently did the question 'how?' follow. This seems to be in line with Foucault.²⁴

Having read Peter Damian, a figure I first encountered in my book on religious flagellation,²⁵ I have become more cautious. On the one hand, I found much more modern psychology in his writings than was to be expected. For Peter Damian, as we have seen, sodomy is not simply anal intercourse, the latter being conceived as a simple physical act, without relational aspects.²⁶ On the contrary, the overall evaluation of sexuality is of course negative, but the fact that sodomy is interpreted in the framework of a father-son relationship is remarkable. One has the impression that psychological insights are emerging. And we can perhaps

24. The same thing was noticed by Bouwman, p. 18.

25. P. Vandermeersch, *La chair de la passion. Une histoire de foi: la flagellation*, Paris, Cerf, 2002.

26. In this sense, I am no longer certain that at least the first of the English translations is wrong in the two cases where the word 'homosexuality' is used by Blum:

...quia, qui feda cum masculo libidinose immunditiae sorde polluitur, ecclesiasticis fungi officiis non meretur, nec idonei sunt, divinum tractare mysterium, qui, ut dicitur, dudum fuerint vasa vitiorum. (p. 309)

it evidently follows that whoever is sullied with the ugly filth of homosexual vice is unworthy of service in ecclesiastical offices. They, moreover, who were once vessels of vice, as was said, are unfit to celebrate the divine mysteries. (p. 30)

Si ergo te impudica caro tua mollities suadendo decepit, si septem dona Spiritus sancti abstulit, si lumen non frontis sed cordis extinxit, non concidas animo, noli funditus desperare, adhuc te in vires collige, viriliter excute, fortia temptare praesume et sic per Dei misericordiam de inimicis tuis poteris triumphare. (p. 322)

The, if your impure flesh has deceived you with homosexual persuasions, if it has stolen the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, if it has extinguished not merely the light of your countenance but that of your spirit, do not be depressed and utterly despair. Once again collect your forces, bestir yourself like a man, dare to perform great deeds, and by so acting you will have the strength, through the mercy of God, to triumph over your enemies. (p. 45)

Lat. text in: *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani* (Ed. Kurt Reindel), (Monumenta Germaniae Historica) vol. I, München, 1983, Eng. tr.: *The Letters of Peter Damian* (tr.: Owen J. Blum), (The Fathers of the Church — Mediaeval Continuation), Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1998.

understand the very peculiar introduction of a female figure, the strange queen of Sodom – in line with Freud's negative Oedipus complex – as an identification with the mother figure.

References to the Oedipus complex are hazardous in a contemporary climate where the knowledge of Freudian thought has become scarce and has often been reduced to clichés. However, I would insist that the Oedipus complex is not essentially the rivalry with the father in the quarrel for the possession of the mother. Equally if not more important is the gaining of identity reached by identification with a father figure through the Oedipus complex.²⁷ Freud became increasingly aware that this identification implied fantasies of adopting a feminine position in relation to him, and thus a secondary identification with the mother in order to strengthen the relationship with the father.²⁸ This is the core of the 'negative' Oedipus complex, which normally complemented the primary form. There is an element of 'homosexuality' (in line with identification) in the constitution of every male identity, and also an element of male femininity (which is in fact not *homosexual*, but *transsexual*). Both aspects of the Oedipus complex constitute the male subject.²⁹

Let me add that, although a human being's need for identification seems to be universal, the Oedipus complex can vary.³⁰ My hypothesis is that Western subjectivity, as it has been peculiarly shaped by Modernity, requires certain particular features of it, whereby an idealisation of the woman and a special emphasis on individual suffering (masochism) play a special role. From this point of view, courtly love (*amour courtois*) and the new spirituality introduced at the end of the Middle Ages could be indicators of the new, individualistic subject yet to come.

Without delving too deeply into this specific psychoanalytic theory, we will simply make the following hypothesis from the perspective of the history of spirituality. Peter Damian's *Liber Gommarhianus* could be a sign of a new type of

27. The importance appears even in the title given by Freud to his first extensive text on the Oedipus complex: 'The identification'. See S. Freud, *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (1921).

28. S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923).

29. I would like to add something that I am asked time and again: there is no coherent, elaborated theory on feminine subjectivity in Freud. Unwilling to arbitrate between Lou Andreas-Salome, Helene Deutsch and his daughter Anna Freud, he transmitted the solving of the mystery of this 'dark continent' (Freud) to his female followers – surely a wise decision. Concerning the author of this article and the problem it deals with, I must add that I would have liked to elaborate on the images of woman involved both in the reception of the Sodom story (in particular the queen) and the negative Oedipus complex. I also regret that I could not discuss the Devil in more detail. But, applying it to myself, I should confess that 'que la plus belle fille du monde ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a.'

30. For a discussion of the 'myth' amongst anthropologists that psychoanalysis depends on the universality of the Western Oedipus complex, see B. Pulman, *Anthropologie et psychanalyse. Malinowski contre Freud*, Paris, PUF, 2002.

spirituality, linked to a new psychological organization of the subject. Whereas, until that time, the emphasis was placed on Trinity, Incarnation and Resurrection, now Christ's earthly body, especially his suffering body, became important in Christian belief. In self-flagellation, the new practice established by Peter Damian – and unknown before him – the pious man attempted to join Christ and, as it is literally stated, to merge with his body. In my book I mentioned the strange insistence of the author of the *Liber gomorrhianus* that flagellation should be performed naked, and that the monk who is ashamed of doing this in front of his brothers is in fact deceived by the devil.³¹ The study by De Chasteigner on the importance attributed by Peter Damian to priestly celibacy provides us with another hint.³² At a time when the doctrine of the *realis presentia* caused much controversy, Peter Damian's basic argument for celibacy was that purity was required for contact with the body of Christ. Would it be so absurd to suppose that the strong aversion to sodomy is an unconscious defence against homosexual feelings for Christ – the perfect brother – experienced by the beloved brother of Damian?

Of course, only Peter himself could confirm or reject this hypothesis with regard to his own psyche. But that should not prevent us from considering a range of representations pervading medieval spirituality and inviting believers to model their desire accordingly. The psychological impact of the new fascination for the body of Christ could be a more important turning point in the religious and cultural history of the West than one would suspect. The subsequent distress with sexuality in the Christian tradition, especially in Catholic circles, could have originated from this, rather than in nineteenth-century Victorian thinking. It would have less to do with simple repression and more with a secret use of unnamed sexual wishes. Is Freud not right to state that subconscious homosexuality as a cement for social cohesion operates the better when it operates unconsciously?

In assigning to Peter Damian the place he deserves in the history of sodomy, it is important to make an *anamnesis* of our sexuality. I am grateful to those biblical scholars who referred to him as a milestone, even if they tried to seduce me to look less at Peter Damian than at the real meaning of the Bible. But, since Paradise, we know how fruitful seductions can be, even if it is dangerous to look back at Sodom.

31. P. Vandermeersch, *La chair de la passion*, p. 51.

32. See note 8.